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DISCUSSION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

HOWARD BRADSTREET, President of the Association of Neighborhood Workers:

While Mr. Ward was saying that we have one acre of parks for every seven hundred fifty people, I wished it were possible for you to see the number of people in lower Manhattan who make application for their share of the space. Certain demands that we make in that part of town are characteristic of all people of the city, whether they live in congested districts or not.

In the first place, we want a place for the small people to go; they now go on the street. It would be very fine if there were small parks, but there are not, excepting two or three, which are used to capacity. I endorse heartily the commissioner's statement about acquiring property while it is yet unbuilt, but I doubt its practicability. An agitation to buy a park cheaply over in The Bronx is met by the statement that there is no need for a park there. A demand for a park in lower Manhattan always evokes the question, Why begin an agitation in a crowded section? Between the two objections we do nothing.

The second demand of our neighborhood is for athletic fields. We now use Van Cortlandt Park, which has to be reached from our section of the city by an hour's ride on the elevated road passing through gangs of different nationalities. That adds excitement to the trip. Aside from Van Cortlandt there is Curtis Field on Staten Island, and even more restricted, Pelham Bay Park.

The third of the needs of our section is for camping places. For camping sites we cannot look to New York city within its city limits except for Pelham Bay and Rockaway, but must look over to New Jersey and the Palisades shore. We are looking this summer with the greatest of interest at the development of the state park back of Haverstraw, running from there north back of Bear Mountain and almost to West Point. That park is being developed for the people. It is possible to camp out there. It is in a natural state and should be kept so. If the city is looking way ahead, it is desirable to purchase grounds outside the city limits such as already exist at Ashokan Dam, and let them be used for summer camping purposes.

My next point deals with the administration of the parks. The appropriation for school recreation work last year was cut in half. There are other cuts in the budget which are deplorable. To be sure, real

estate can not stand more taxation. Very good—but neither will we stand a cutting down in things which we wish and which are proper for us to have. It is for our statesmen to get added sources of income and see that these facilities are provided. Again, why should the restaurants on park property, like the Claremont, be let to private concerns, which serve only the wealthy at high prices? There are buildings in Central Park, in Van Cortlandt Park, in Pelham Bay Park, in many of the parks of the city, in fact, which should by direct public control through the park department be made open to the public, so that prices may be made moderate for moderate purses. If there are people who must have a five- or ten-dollar dinner, the automobile will quickly take them where they can get excellent accommodations without occupying public park property.

Finally, the attractive automobile roads that have been mentioned are of course fine things, but personally, I feel sorry when I go down to the Narrows and see an automobile road that will soon fill in the little coves and beachy places where mothers and babies and children and fathers now go off a Sunday to camp out on the shore. I regret very much the tendency to develop the elaborate parts of our plan at cost of the more cozy and homelike places.

MR. W. B. VAN INGEN:

I have taken an interest in the parks and primarily in Central Park, because I believe it to be the most beautiful object in the United States created by man. The extreme beauty of the park led me to inquire how it came to be what it is, and my investigations disclosed the fact that the credit belongs to the original designers, Olmsted and Vaux. Their plans were bitterly attacked, and the execution has suffered much from the ravages of successive park commissioners, most of whom were either men looking for a soft job, or what is worse, uplifters. Uplifters are the most troublesome persons that we have except the Tweed gang; and the Tweed gang and the uplifters work on identical lines for the destruction of the parks; one with a bad motive and one with a supposedly good motive. In the present commissioner, happily, we have an intelligent man who is conscientiously trying to adhere to the original plans.

The original plan for Central Park was to have no buildings in it save those absolutely essential for actual physical comfort, but to have it surrounded by public buildings wherever they were necessary. Manhattan Square, the site of the present Museum of Natural History, containing

eighteen or twenty acres, is an example. A site extending from Sixty-sixth street to Sixty-eighth street on Fifth avenue, running back to Third avenue, called Hamilton Park at the time that the park property was obtained, and containing eighteen or twenty acres, would have been the ideal place for the Metropolitan Museum. Instead they are taking up the ground which we want for some other purpose, disregarding the wise plans of the designers.

Each commissioner, having a four years' term of office, seems to be afflicted with the idea that he must do something. So he neglects all that the previous commisioner did, and does something himself, only to have his work neglected by the commissioner that succeeds him. In the south of Ninety-seventh street transverse road, one of the ideal meadow spaces of the world was turned by a recent park commissioner into a tennis court, the commissioner stating that he wished to have one of the finest tennis courts in the world. That sounds fine, but we lacked the park space, and to-day the finest tennis court in the world has no iron and no netting around it. Some day it is bound to be restored to the children and not left to the professionals. The whole incident is a piece of nonsense. In fact, the whole history of Central Park is one series of accidents, one series of bits of nonsense, occasioned entirely by the fact that a man thinks he has to do something, though he knows nothing at all about the subject or about the history of the park.

This state of affairs cannot be corrected unless you get the idea that the park system is a sequential affair. The condition is not going to be remedied by changing this and changing that. But if you establish an idea that the thing is a permanent arrangement, then you may bring up your argument as to why this or that should be done. It is all very well to talk about the park being used for the people. In 1862, according to actual count, ten million people entered the park; in 1872, nearly eleven million. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that at least twenty million people a year enter the park now. Therefore to talk about a certain set of boys playing baseball in there and that being the people, in the face of twenty million visitors a year, is simply talking nonsense under fancy names and under a sort of catch-word phrases. I am just as much one of the people as though I were a boy playing baseball.

Of all things that men create, the most permanent is a park, because everything else that man makes is made of material that disintegrates with time, but a park renews itself every day. Stick to your plan, then; develop that plan, and you have the most permanent thing in the world. Olmsted and Vaux in planning Central Park looked far into the future. If we had listened to them at that time, we should now have had this park

extending from the Palisades right through across the Fifty-ninth street bridge straight down to the ocean.

All these facts that I tell you are down in records. Those records should be brought out and correlated, so that whenever a commissioner goes into office, if he wants any information, all that is necessary is to look at the records. A consistent and progressive administration would thus be made possible.

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